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Whipple, John.

Substance of a speech delivered at a Whig meeting, held at the town house, Providence, R.I., August 28, 1832

Providence, 1832

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MR. WHIPPLE'S SPEECH.

SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE WHIG MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HOUSE, PROVIDENCE, R. I., AUGUST 28, 1837,
BY JOHN WHIPPLE, ESQ.

Mr. Chairman—

I once more appear before my fellow townsmen, to perform, what I consider, an imperious duty. This duty, sir, is of a mixed character; partly painful and partly pleasing. It is painful when we reflect that the ruinous measures which have brought our Country to its present alarming condition, have been supported, almost by acclamation, by a majority of the American People. It is pleasing, very pleasing, to see that there are yet so many of us, who do not entirely despair of shaking off the incubus, which has paralyzed so large a portion of the nation.

We have met, sir, to make one struggle more to save a sinking Constitution. Shoulder to shoulder, we have before fought at the outposts and upon the ramparts. Inch by inch, we have been driven by numbers, and by hireling troops, until at last we are at the Citadel, not merely of the Constitution, but of law, of social order, nay of freedom itself. Here we must stand, and here, come what may, we *will* stand. For one, sir, if the Constitution must fall, I am ready to fall with it.

It is known to you, possibly to others, that to most of the mere party squabbles for mere party purposes, I have remained almost an indifferent spectator. But when I see the plain and massy columns which support the splendid Temple erected by our Fathers, one after another, falling beneath it—when I see that the hands employed in this

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sacreligious work are paid from the gold plundered from Temple itself, I feel that neutrality is but another name for becoming a party to the plunder.

Sir, we seem almost to have forgotten *who* we are, and *what* we are. A deep and fatal lethargy is upon us. From one end to the other of this extensive Country, a dead and almost uniform silence seems to reign. Among the millions of free and energetic intellects scattered over our wide domain, we see but here and there one, able or willing to raise his voice to the pitch which the crisis demands. Even the poverty and ruin, brought to our doors by the foulest of all misrules, appears not to have disturbed our fatal sleep.

The Institutions established by our Fathers, and which for years have diffused among us blessings to which all other nations are perfect strangers, are rudely overthrown. Principles subversive of civil liberty, and at open war with social order, are boldly advanced. Changes are designedly and wickedly made in the whole system of our commercial exchange. The fountains of trade are suddenly dried up, and thousands upon thousands of our most industrious citizens are plunged from affluence to poverty, and from poverty down almost to penury and despair; and still we sleep on, as if it were the sleep of death—let me tell you, sir, that so far as the cause of republican government is concerned, if it continue much longer, it *will* be the sleep of death.

I should be more easily reconciled to the present alarming condition of the Country, if I could see that the measures which have produced it, had been the result of the mistakes or blunders of our rulers; for in such a case it would be of short duration. The infancy and vigor of the Country would soon outgrow it. But these experiments have all been the result of design. They are merely parts of a broad and well settled scheme; which scheme is as necessary to the purposes of those who devised it, now, as it was at its original adoption. It is still

persevered in, and unless timely checked, will be persevered in until the power of the people is entirely annihilated.

The scheme is, to perpetuate the Chief Magistracy of the Country in the hands of a few self-elected leaders of the dominant party. This is the great and chief object, and the measures which have been pursued, are but means by which to accomplish that object.

These means consist principally in so great an increase of the power of the Executive, that in time it will become independent both of Congress and the people. At first view, it may seem difficult to confer upon the Executive so vast a power. But, sir, in point of fact it has already been in part accomplished, and by means as simple and obvious, as they are wicked and corrupt. It has been in part accomplished—in the first place, by the removal of all the officers under the Government, and the substitution of others who hold their offices upon the condition, express or implied, that they and all their friends shall use all their influence, personal or official, to continue the present state of things, right or wrong.

This was the *first* step; and the second was, to place under the unlimited control of the Executive, the vast treasure of the whole Country.

Now, sir, it cannot be denied that both these measures have been already adopted. It cannot be denied that they were parts of the settled policy of the administration. Sir, instead of being denied, it is openly avowed and openly justified. Neither can it be denied that these measures are the principal causes of the present calamities. All that can be denied is, that these measures have been adopted, and these evils brought upon us, with a view to perpetuate the first office of the nation in the hands of the prominent leaders of the ruling party, and to render that office independent both of Congress and the people.

Sir, these are grave and deliberate charges not to be made rashly, nor to be established but by grave and competent proof. These men, like all others, are not to be

condemned, but upon evidence which the common sense of ages has ratified, as the test of truth. By the main features of their characters, so far as their characters mingle in their public acts, and by the necessary tendency and effect of these measures, must they stand or fall at the great bar of public opinion.

Allow me then, sir, to appeal to this character and to these measures, and I do it with a confidence that we shall find in neither, anything to elevate our drooping hopes of the stability of our Government, or the permanency of our unrivalled Institutions. In justice to myself, and the views I am forced to take, I am compelled to say, that I have never indulged the dreamy hope that on the whole, we were a wiser or better people, than the countless nations which have gone before us. History, sir, when properly read, is full of wisdom and instruction; and the lesson which it reads us, is not very favorable to the designing flattery which political men have pressed upon the age and the nation in which we live.

I will glance at the characters of two of the leading authors of our present evils, in order to see if there is anything which can relieve them from the just suspicions of an abused and indignant people, that a broad and settled scheme to perpetuate their power, has been deliberately formed, and in part, deliberately executed. I will speak of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, and I beg leave to premise that I have not the slightest personal feeling unfriendly to either of them.

Andrew Jackson was by nature a coarse, rough, and very passionate man. This, his most intimate friends do not pretend to deny. Neither his education nor his early habits have done much to soften these native elements of his character; for he was brought up with a rifle gun in one hand, and a Kentucky knife in the other. With the former he occasionally hunted game, and occasionally the poor and abused Indian. What use he made of the latter I do not know. He was savage and vindictive in his

passions, bitter and unrelenting in his prejudices, and unbounded and persevering in his ambition. With all these fierce and indomitable qualities, I am inclined to believe that he was originally honest in his purposes, and sincere and faithful in his attachments. But his honesty had about as much influence over his dark and malignant passions, as the little republic of Genoa had over the gloomy monarchies and fierce despotisms of modern Europe.

Martin Van Buren, on the other hand, is a character of an entirely opposite cast. He was a shrewd, subtle and calculating lawyer. Neither at the Bar, nor in the Senate, did he ever aspire to the highest kind of eloquence; for he well knew that to be eloquent, required a large share of moral principle and moral feelings. By long habit he has become wily and schemy beyond most other men, and his low dexterity and habitual cunning, are altogether inconsistent with patriotic and high minded conduct, or fine and lofty feeling.

What Sir Robert Walpole was to the English House of Commons, Mr. Van Buren is to the American people. He sincerely believes that every man has his price, and his whole conduct from his first start in New York to the present day, evinces his fidelity to his own principles. These principles necessarily lead to wily conduct, and wily conduct necessarily clothes the face with a wily look. Accordingly what Junius said of an eminent Scotchman, is true of him: "Whenever I see a Scotchman smile, I feel an involvntary emotion to guard myself against mischief."

These, sir, are the two men whom the American people have successively raised to the first office in the nation; and if I have given anything like a fair outline of their general characters, there is nothing in either, that would lead us to suppose that they would hesitate at any means likely to perpetuate the power of themselves or their party.

But, sir, a much fairer way of judging of their motives and designs, is, by a brief examination of their conduct;

and allow me to ask, what measures of a *national* character, were proposed or adopted by either of them during the eight years administration of Andrew Jackson? Sir, he had money, and popularity, and power to an unlimited extent. What use did he ever make of either, except for party purposes? He pulled down and demolished much of what his predecessors had built up, but what did he build up himself? What public improvements of any kind did he propose or adopt? What did he do for national roads, for internal facilities? What for trade, for education? Has not his whole administration been the work of demolition?

One of his first efforts of this nature was upon his own cabinet, and evinced a settled scheme to reduce the whole frame work of the government to an abject obedience to his despotic will. He called Berrien and Branch, two high minded men from the South, to a seat in the councils of the nation.—These men had not yet descended to the level of the New York politics. They would not allow Van Buren to play his game with false cards, or in other words, to buy popular favor with public money. For this reason, and for this alone, they were dismissed. Ingham shared the same fate, and at a subsequent period, M'Lean and Duane.

These men, sir, were bound to act according to their consciences. The nation had a right to their deliberate judgment upon pending measures. They were not to throw up their hats and cry long live the chief, but to deliberate and decide for the nation.—Sir, because they did deliberate and decide according to their consciences, instead of acquiescing in the New York scheme of heaping all the power upon the Executive, they were rudely and wantonly dismissed, and more pliant substitutes selected. Never, since the establishment of our Government, had such a reckless measure been resorted to before. No previous President ever before dared so to sport with the dignity of the nation. Allow me to ask why this unheard of

and extraordinary measure were resorted to, if not with some unheard of and extraordinary design.

But, sir, the main and the prominent measure of his Administration was another novelty, as startling and as dangerous, as it was wicked and corrupt. I mean the general removal of faithful officers, for no other cause than that of thinking and acting for themselves. If such had been the previous policy of the Government, it would be unfair to charge it as a sin upon Andrew Jackson. But in point of fact, the well settled policy of all previous Administrations had been precisely the reverse. It had grown into a maxim, that in political as well as religious matters, every man had a right to act according to his judgment and his conscience.—Andrew Jackson was bold and wicked enough to pull down this wise and well settled policy, and to proclaim to every office holder in the country that he would pay him the amount of his salary, be it five hundred, or five thousand dollars, so long as he supported all his measures, right or wrong, and no longer. Sir, a more depraved, wicked and corrupting policy, never was adopted in the most iron despotism of the darkest ages. I defy its parallel, either in the depravity of its motive, or the corrupting influence of its effects. What is but a bribe? With what other design was it introduced? With what other design has it been so steadily persevered in?

I do not mean to assert, that every officer under this new system felt that he had been bribed; for there are undoubtedly many upright and honest men among them. What I mean to assert is, that this extraordinary change was intended to produce in their minds a secret or an open influence, equivalent to a bribe. Sir, has it not had the intended effect? Do they not, from some motive or other, resort to the most untiring and extraordinary means to live up to the condition of their appointment? Until this wicked change, have we ever seen our public officers, almost to a man, drilled and marched in countless numbers,

in such an appalling array, in support of every measure of the appointing power?

Sir, under the general Government, and those of the States friendly to the present Administration, and bound by the same corrupt policy, there are probably nearly one hundred thousand officers. Allowing that each officer will carry to the polls from among his numerous relations and dependents, four votes each—it would give to the Administration an army of five hundred thousand voters, all bound to a bountiful leader by the fascinating influence of gold.

If this is not corruption, what is corruption? If all this was not done with some fixed purpose and design, why was it done at all? If the public good had required it, why was it not discovered by some previous Administration? It gave Andrew Jackson votes enough to secure his re-election. It conferred upon him the power of naming his successor. He did name his successor, and used all the influence of his office to secure his election, and by the aid of these household troops, thus wantonly paid out of the public money, his election was secured.

But this is not all. It was the design of this infamous combination of ambitious demagogues, not only to employ the whole aggregate salaries of all the United States and State officers, as so many vast engines for party purposes; but they could not remain satisfied, while a single cent of the public money remained unemployed in aid of the same base design. By a law of the land, the treasure of the nation was deposited in the Bank of the United States. While there, it was beyond the reach of Andrew Jackson or Martin Van Buren. An attempt was made to buy the Bank over as an ally. This attempt totally failed. The deposits were then removed by one of the most arbitrary and despotic acts that ever disgraced a Turkish Bashaw. This money, thus foully seized, was placed in the hands of the thousand stockholders and directors of favored Banks, and thus contributed to swell wider and deeper

the tide of golden influence. The Bank of the United States was demolished. Three hundred new Banks arose from its ashes. Specie payments were suspended, and a period of calamity has ensued, the duration of which none of us can foretell.

Sir, I ask again, with what *motive* were all these changes introduced? With what motive were the salaries of all the public officers converted into so many bribes to purchase votes? Did the public good require it? It is not pretended. Was it called for by any moral principle? It is agreed to be profligate and corrupt. What, then, was the motive? The leading men and the leading papers all agree it was for party purposes and party purposes alone. Were not the deposites removed for the same purpose? Was not the Bank destroyed in aid of the same nefarious scheme?

Am I not right, then, when I assert that a grand scheme was concerted by Jackson and Van Buren to perpetuate their dynasty; that the means by which to effect the object was, to concentrate all the powers of the Government in the Executive organ, so as to render it independent both of Congress and the people? That this power was the power of the money of the nation? Am I not right, when I assert, that that scheme has already in part been accomplished?

Sir, was not the whole of the public treasure formerly in the hands of Congress by a law of the land? Is it not now in point of fact in the Executive? Who conferred this power upon the Executive? Previous to the reign of Andrew Jackson it was in Congress. Now it is in the Executive. How did it get there? By a law of Congress? No, sir. By a vote of the people? No, sir. It was *seized* by the Executive in defiance of Congress, and in defiance of the people.

Was it seized by accident or mistake? Was it not by design? It is agreed that it was. What, then, was that design, if not to render the Executive independent?

Sir, will it not render it independent? I do not mean theoretically or legally, but *practically* independent. Will it not enable the Executive to defeat any law which may be introduced to restore the power to Congress? Are there not members enough who either are, or may be made interested to legalize this arbitrary power of the leader of their party?

Sir, how is it with the people? Allowing for the usual honest division of opinion, this money will turn nineteen elections out of twenty in favor of these arbitrary leaders of the dominant party. Is this a free expression of the will of the people? Is this the boasted independence of our elections?

Sir, it is in vain, it is idle to reason upon such a subject. Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, in defiance of the laws of the land, have seized upon a never failing instrument of power. With it they have already paralyzed Congress, and they have already paralyzed a large portion of the people, and where is its power to end?

Sir, it is a disgrace to attempt to reason upon such a subject. We might as well stop to reason with the midnight ruffian applying the fire brand to our dwelling. The fire brand is already applied to our holy temple of Constitutional freedom. The destructive element is already kindling, and unless the friends of constitutional law rally in all their strength, this most beautiful work of human minds, will ere long, for a moment illumine the world with its blaze; it will then fall in darkness and in ruins, and where among the nations of the world, is there another resting place in which the spirit of liberty can lay her head?

Sir, when I contemplate these atrocious acts of lawless power, when I see that not a minister or king, no nor a despot in Europe, ever held in his hand an instrument half so effective, as is the whole treasure of this rich and extended country; when I see that the man who wields this tremendous power is wily, ambitious and aspiring; when I see the hundreds of thousands who are fattening

upon this treasure constantly shouting Hosanna to the most high, and when I see other hundreds of thousands of houseless free suffrage voters, ready at a call to flock to the standard of these pretended friends of the poor, I feel that as a friend to constitutional freedom, I could devote my whole soul to its rescue; "that I could raise my voice to such a pitch, that it should reach every log house beyond the mountains," and that at its summons, millions of free and independent men would rush from their retreats, and hurl these aspiring demagogues from their guilty thrones.

But sir, I am checked in these dreamy hopes, by the reflection that other voices louder and deeper, and issuing from bosoms better filled with the love of country than mine, have for years, sounded the alarm in vain; that the stern, and manly, and patriotic spirit of Webster has poured forth its devotedness to the cause of freedom, and the Constitution, in tones, which in other days, would have been listened to by stocks and stones; and that the warm heart and chrystal head of Clay, with a patriot's and a prophet's fire, have been almost worn down and exhausted in its behalf.

A deep and deadly lethargy has indeed come upon us. Man worship and idolatry, like a cloud, hangs over and darkens the American mind. To what other cause can we impute the apparently unimportant fact that these blind and devoted worshippers have compared, profanely compared the chief author of all our present evils, to Washington himself. To Washington, who lived not for himself, nor for a party; no, nor for his country alone, but for the cause of freedom throughout the world. His spirit still lives, and is performing the great work originally assigned it.—Go on then pure and holy spirit, and fulfil thy destiny! Thou wilt roll on through thy vast and magnificent orbit, to be gazed at, admired and imitated, so long as the sense of patriotic ardor and moral grandeur hold dominion in the human bosom; thou wilt track thy splendid pathway down from age to age; and when the last nations that inhabit this beautiful world, shall

be wearing away, and human power and human grandeur are closing up their last account, thy beacon light shall still shine aloft, and thy spotless name ascend to heaven, in the prayers of millions of pure and patriotic men !

Andrew Jackson, the mere powdered rocket, sent up by the feverish breath of popular prejudice, and already falling amid the gloom and desolation which he himself has created, he to compare with Washington ! "Hyperion to a Satyr. A mildewed ear, blasting its wholesome brother." He has indeed fallen amid the gloom and distress created by his own wicked hand. That distress has swept over our land like the Siroc of the east, leaving nothing but the sands of desolation in its track. It has visited every rank and class of men. Upon every calling and every profession, it has left its withering touch.

We see the intelligent, the skilful, the honorable merchant, entirely prostrated by the blow. We see the patient and industrious manufacturer, after having devoted his whole life to the accumulation of a little subsistence for his family, now wandering about our streets, pale and care worn, and reduced almost to want and beggary. We see the inventive the skilful and never tiring mechanic, obliged either to emigrate to a distant and unknown country, or to remain a witness to the suffering and distress of a worthy family here. But above all, we see among the humble laborers, who have been reduced by the wicked flattery of these pretended friends of their class, every form of misery which belongs to human suffering. Whole families are wandering about the country houseless, foodless and friendless. Every morning, thousands rise from their bed of earth, without a crust of bread to mitigate their hunger. Every night many a half famished mother, lies down with her half famished infant, struggling at her exhausted bosom.

Sir, in this hour of gloom, of beggary and despair, where are these pretended friends of the humble poor?

In the halls of legislation enacting laws for their relief? Assembled in mighty Conventions, to force by combina-

tion a liberal charity for their support? straining their own private means, to heal the wounds inflicted by their own wicked hands? No, sir, no. From one end to the other of the country, not a hand is lifted, not a voice is raised, not a heart is moved; but we see them feasting and fattening upon fifty millions of the public treasure, swearing that the grand experiment is working well, and throwing up their hats, in honor of the chief who devised it.

Gracious God, where are we? In what age—in what nation? Is this indeed our own, our native land? Are we descended from that proud and lofty race, who, upon the mere threat of injury, called up the scourging storm of revolution, went out upon the mighty deep and battle field, and poured forth their blood like rain, in defence of their country's honor?

Is there remaining among us no moral Scipio, who can again rally the broken forces of our moral power, and wage an everlasting war against these defilers of their Country's fame? Is this swelling tide of all-corrupting gold, to sweep over the whole of our land, palsy the nerve of every arm, and quench the fire of every heart?

Sir, we do indeed seem to have forgotten that we are living under a republican government; that our honor and our fame are not committed to the care of ministers and kings, nor entrusted to the vigilance of a proud and prudent aristocracy; that the sacred deposite is in our hands, and that we are its only sentinels. When we become inactive or corrupt, who will guard the sacred treasure?

For one, sir, I could almost forgive all the other evils which these vile seducers have heaped upon us, could they but heal the deep and deadly moral wound upon the Country. I am aware that the loss of property is truly painful; that the destruction of the industry and business of the Country is distressing, and that the sufferings of the poor are beyond my power of description. But, sir, these are physical evils, and have their limit. They are neither contagious nor transmissible. They bring with them a winter of great severity and bitterness; but upon

such a winter, spring will again return with all its energy and freshness. New flowers will again be spread over our paths, and new beauty again gladden our hearts. But once corrupt the moral sense of a people, and you freeze up every generous and patriotic feeling. You bring upon it worse than the winter of death; for no spring will visit its mouldering urn, nor shine on the night of its grave.

Sir, the charge, the great and heavy charge which I bring against these men in power is, that they have degraded our moral feeling, that they have, to the utmost of their power, dried up the source of manly and patriotic sentiment, and that they have done this by a kind of meanness always allied to little minds. The man who stands before me face to face, and prostrates me with a blow, I may at least respect; but he who seduces my weakness or corrupts my morals, is as mean and contemptible as he is wicked and depraved. For one, sir, I acknowledge no difference between public and private profligacy. By the general consent of mankind, he who enters the dwelling of a friend, and under the shelter of kindness and hospitality corrupts the integrity of his wife or daughter, ought to be consigned to an immediate gallows; and yet, sir, what is this but a breach of trust and confidence? What ought, then, to be the punishment of those who assume the sacred trust of guardians to the property and the honor of a great and prosperous people, and perpetuate their power, by corrupting the moral feelings of their confiding wards.

Sir, I much fear that we keep our eye too exclusively upon physical evils; that we too often forget that in a republic, moral diseases which spread their contagion far and wide, and even transmit it to posterity, are more fatal because more contagious. We seem entirely to overlook the experience of other nations, and the never failing lessons of history. It was moral and not physicial evils that destroyed all the ancient and all the modern republics. While the people themselves remain pure, no human force can avail against them.

Solon, sir, was the lawgiver of the little republic of Athens. After making himself master of the collected wisdom of other nations, he conferred upon his country a Constitution which never yet has been surpassed in the broad and sound views which it took of human society. It was the foundation of the laws of all succeeding nations. Under it, that little republic arrived to a pitch of wealth, of strength, and of national glory, which is still the admiration of the world. Sir, it was not the form of her free Constitution, but the spirit, the pure, lofty and patriotic spirit, which produced it, that worked out this miracle in national power and national glory. That spirit infused itself into all her legislation, and shone resplendent in all her national contests. For one hundred and fifty years she continued in her bright ascent, when it was her fate to fall into the hands of the splendid, but the cool and ambitious Pericles.—He too, was a friend to the poor by whom he was elevated to power. He broke open the sacred Temple where was deposited all the treasure of the nation. He distributed it among his partizans and friends. He bought a people, with a peoples' gold. From that day forward, Athens drooped her proud and lofty head. Neither the power nor patriotism of her Phocion, nor the deep and thrilling tones of her Demosthenes could rouse her from her fatal lethargy. She gradually declined from the tyrant power of one little demagogue to that of one still lower, and finally breathed her last at the foot of the throne of Philip.

Sir, the ancient and original spirit of Athens, was the revolutionary spirit of our own country; the spirit which poured out its blood at Lexington and Bunker Hill, and finally triumphed with inconceivable splendor on the heights of Yorktown. It gave us a Constitution on the Athenian model. It was the spirit of law, of order, of regulated freedom. Under that spirit, we rose from poverty to affluence, from affluence to power, and were ascending along the most brilliant pathway to national glory, when it was our lot to fall into the hands not of a splendid Per-

icles, but the cool, the wily and ambitious demagogue, whose foot is now upon us. He too broke open the Temple where was deposited our national treasure. He too, divided it among his partizans and friends, and from that day, we like Athens, began to droop our proud and lofty head. The cold and icy hand that administered this poison is still upon us. It must be removed or we shall surely die. Like Athens we shall pass down from the yoke of one demagogue to the yoke of another, and finally expire in the arms of some modern Philip.

Let no man flatter himself that this is the prediction of excited alarm, or of party feeling. It is the grave lesson of universal history. Unless this withering and corrupting hand is removed, we shall surely die. We shall die, sir, not of a sudden blow, but by a slow and lingering consumption. On the nation's cheek I can already see the first flush of the alarming hectic. From her deep bosom I can already hear the first sounds of the low and hollow cough; and upon her whole body I can discern the cold night sweat of fatal disease. Nothing but a great and tremendous effort can save us. Our whole moral atmosphere must be changed. Sir, are we prepared for this effort?

For one, sir, I am not ready to give up this noble ship. Call all hands to their quarters. Nail the stars and stripes of our national glory to the head of the mast. Let the watchword be, sink or swim, death or victory. Rise, rise in all the majesty of your strength. I hear the voices of your Fathers from their tombs, beseeching you not to disgrace the holy cause of freedom. I see the uplifted hands of your infants from their cradles, imploring you not to leave them slaves. "I see the eye of the immortal Washington lighten along your embattled ranks.' I see you bearing down to the contest—I already hear the shouts of triumphant victory. Our gallant ship shall again ride proudly o'er the ocean's wave, and our unstained banner float proudly in the ocean's breeze. There may it ride, and there may it float, until it shall achieve for Freedom her great, her final triumph!

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